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Ron Brandolini Award Remarks

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San Jacinto College

First, I would like to thank NCHC for this incredible honor. I have had the pleasure for more than two decades of working in honors education and discovering the joy of being paid to help change lives while having so much fun, so I would also like to thank San Jacinto College for supporting honors throughout those decades.

This award has special significance to me because I was lucky enough to know and work with Ron Brandolini and to consider him a friend. Since I am an historian, indulge me as I tell a short story of how I met Ron.

In 1996, on my third try, I convinced San Jacinto College to start an honors program, and so I came to the NCHC meeting in Atlanta that fall. The president of NCHC that year was Herb Lasky, from Eastern Illinois University, whom I knew through grading Advanced Placement history exams; he had been my table leader my first year. Herb had encouraged me to propose an honors program and had promised that if I ever got a program approved, he would set me up with the best community college honors expert at NCHC. After his Presidential Address, Herb took me and Ron Brandolini to the concierge floor for coffee; as he said, “I’m buying both of you coffee
because it’s free up here!” Then he left me with a treasure trove of knowledge and experience—Ron!

For the next ninety minutes, I picked the brain of “the best community college honors director in the country.” First, he gave me an overview of the program at Valencia College, which he directed, and how it got started. Next, he explained how NCHC worked and why I needed to come every year, after which he answered questions for at least an hour. I left Atlanta understanding how to begin a program. I unabashedly used everything I had learned in setting up the San Jacinto College Honors Program. Much of what we have accomplished at San Jac over the past couple of decades is based on Ron Brandolini’s taking time with me back in 1996.

Over the years I got to know Ron better through the NCHC. He was always warm, giving me his advice whenever I asked. As the program grew, I always had more questions. When I tried to thank him for all he did for me, he just shrugged it off, but this award would not be possible without his having taken time with a 35-year-old newbie in Atlanta. If it were possible, he should be the one receiving the award named for him.

I have tried to “live in the spirit” of Ron during my time in honors by helping colleagues whenever possible. While providing support to other honors educators is “the NCHC way,” to me it will always be above all “the Brandolini way.” So I say “Thank you” to NCHC and to San Jacinto College, but, most importantly, I say “Thank you Ron.” We miss you and wish you were still with us in person as well as in influence.

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